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DC SMALL BUSINESSES ACCESS INTERNATIONAL PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The District of Columbia Department of Small and Local Business Development's ExportDC Program takes District businesses to the Headquarters of NATO and the European Union in Brussels, Belgium.

(Washington, D.C.) – Six DC firms alongside the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD), met with Belgian officials at the Embassy of Belgium last Tuesday. These DC small businesses all participated in the NATO Procurement Seminar in Brussels, Belgium, which was held in September, at NATO headquarters. Next steps for partnering with the Embassy on future international projects and local outreach sessions were among discussion items on the agenda.

It is widely known that many DC-based firms have skills and experience in winning local and federal government contracts. Now with DSLBD's ExportDC program, firms can leverage their domestic contracting experience into international procurement opportunities. As a capital city and the seat of the European Union, Brussels shares much in common with the District of Columbia, including the fact that the two cities have an active 'Sister City Agreement' initiated in 1985 and renewed by Mayor Vincent C. Gray in 2011. Ranging in a variety of sectors including IT, communications, technology security, and cyber defense, each DC firm found a potential niche at the NATO Procurement Seminar and NIAS Cyber Security Symposium. They learned about how a newly reorganized NATO was aggressively seeking qualified firms to help build the capabilities of the organization and carry out its mission. The DC participants were able to take full advantage of the seminar at NATO headquarters as well as opportunities to meet with large multinational firms like Verizon, Cisco, and Lockheed Martin. Four of the six participating DC businesses are Certified Business Enterprises (CBEs).

ExportDC, now in its third year, has been helping DC businesses, committed to expanding their international presence, access new markets. Through the DC State Trade and Export Promotion (STEP) Program, ExportDC awarded grants to 17 District based businesses in FY 2014 to pursue various international business opportunities. ExportDC funded business-to-business and business-to-government matching projects in 18 countries in FY 2014, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, Netherlands, New Zealand, Panama, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, and Sweden.

The ExportDC program is funded in part through a Federal/State cooperative agreement administered by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). DSLBD is pleased to announce that the cooperative agreement with SBA has been renewed for fiscal year 2015, ensuring District-based businesses will continue to benefit from ExportDC services, creating more opportunities for local businesses to expand internationally.

"We are excited to offer such valuable services to District small businesses," said Robert Summers, Director of the Department of Small and Local Business Development. "ExportDC has taken DC businesses to 18 different markets around the world, significantly enhancing their overseas marketing efforts. FY 2014 was particularly notable in that ExportDC organized its first trade mission to Europe, emphasizing international procurement opportunities as an emerging core competency for DC small businesses."

ExportDC's next trip to Europe will be a Cyber Security Business Development Mission to Poland and Romania in May 2015. This trade mission will focus on introducing qualified DC firms to the rapidly expanding cyber security markets in Eastern and Central Europe.

For more information about ExportDC services, visit <http://dslbd.dc.gov/service/exportdc>.

About the District of Columbia Department of Small and Local Business Development

The District of Columbia Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD) fosters the economic growth, development, and retention of District of Columbia based businesses, and promotes economic development throughout the District's commercial districts. For more information, go to dslbd.dc.gov or contact us at dslbd@dc.gov. Follow DSLBD on Twitter at @SmallBizDC, or like our Facebook page www.facebook.com/smallbizdc.